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Simplicity of form

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SIMPLICITY OF FORM

By

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A Self Portrait

activity of mark-making. "The simplest marks communicate the complex sensations in a visual notation most capable of conveying it from the artist to the viewer."²

Although I am a printmaker by definition, I have a tendency to work like a painter. I create freely and spontaneously. I am attracted to the interaction between the materials needed to create a print. It is this physical and immediate process of printmaking that I respond to the most.

Monotype processes are particularly useful for the development of automatic imagery. By producing rapid and often unpredictable effects, they provide great flexibility for the artist whose creativity is heightened by suggestive imagery. Because the process functions as an immediate stage of transferring, a series of drawings and impressions can be made and discarded, until through calculated chance, a desirable effect is achieved. The nature of the monotype process is such that it obscures the techniques employed to a greater degree than do most other image-forming processes.³

The pages to follow are an attempt to explain my visual language. My diary-like approach is, I believe, the most effective way in which to articulate such intangible thoughts and feelings. In addition, because each is an unique image, I would like to explain each separately, thus maintaining their own individuality.

"A SELF PORTRAIT"

Form is formulation - the turning of content into material entity, rendering a content accessible to others, giving it permanence, willing it to the race. Form is as varied as are the accidental meetings in nature. Form in art is as varied as the idea itself...It is the visible shape of all man's growth; it is the living picture of all his tribe at its most primitive, and of the legend-barbaric, epic, sculptural, musical, pictorial, architectural; it is the infinite images of religion, it is the

expression and the remnant⁴ of self. Form is the vary shape of content.

"A Self-Portrait" is a collage of printed parts. It is a monoprint simply because it is one of a kind. I must admit, creating art is a complicated mix of sugar. I had a lot of fun trying to fit together the parts that make up this image. I didn't have a formal reason why or how I wanted to put the three different printed parts together. All I knew, at the beginning, was that I did in fact have three separate pieces which I wanted to reassemble to represent myself in a self-portrait.

This picture was brought together in much the same manner as a puzzle. I soon realized this task was easier said than done. The piece on the left-hand side was printed and immediately discarded. I trashed this piece because it didn't have the compositional strength to stand on its own as an image. Furthermore, I was disappointed with it and wanted it out of my sight. But soon after, I realized it did, in fact, have aesthetic value. I decided that in itself the piece was incohesive, but within the realm of other parts it could work. I nervously resurrected it from the garbage can hoping it wasn't soiled by studio oidments. Later, I inked an aluminum plate (see Appendix #1) in black and green, contouring the three shapes I wanted to put together. I chine-colléd (see Appendix #2) the parts and pulled the print. Afterwards, I decided to change the hue of the left-hand shape to blue, a color more provocatively awkward. I believed



Slightly Neurotic -- -- Can U Tell

this was the last element needed to clarify my intent. The image was finished.

The most important question, perhaps, is what does the picture mean? My only answer, "A Self Portrait."

"SLIGHTLY NEUROTIC - - CAN U TELL"

"Art becomes among other things, creatively producing hitherto nonexistent forms. Instead of imitating forms, it invents them. The artist becomes godlike."⁵ To create this print, I approached my materials without any preconceived notion concerning what I was or was not feeling. In hindsight, I realized this image evolved from marks already present. The plate, which I use for every monoprint, contains "history lines", remnants of past creative endeavors. The plate had a collection of scrapes and lines on it from previous images, so that when I start a new image those marks were present. They were the foundation from which all my images were produced.

This image represents a creative breakthrough in my exploring of a variety of new monoprinting techniques. I changed my foundation color from black to a deep purple. I don't usually use violet because I think the color is in itself much too "pretty". I created an interesting pillow shape by scraping the ink away with a razor blade. At this point, I was curious to see what the effects of the pastel would give when transferred from the plate to the paper. I used the pastels in much the same manner as crayons, contouring



My Wonderful World of Make Believe

the upside down torso and creating line. I was anxious to see the results - I had to pull the print. I was not at this point happy with what I saw, although I very much liked the effects of the pastels. I continued by rolling olive green ink on the upper right part of the pillow shape. I was pleased that it created a new illusion of space but still knew it wasn't enough to finish this statement. I needed to push the image more. It's pretty neat, almost magical how ideas pop into your head while engaged in the creative process. "Acrylic paint will do the trick," I thought to myself, and much to my surprise it did. I moved swiftly to work with the paint satisfying the pictorial needs of the image. While working on this print, in particular, I realized most of my creative energy is produced by serendipity and hyperactivity.

"MY WONDERFUL WORLD OF MAKE BELIEVE"

"The minute I sat in front of a canvas, I was happy, because it was a world, and I could do what I liked in it."⁶

I distinctly remember wanting to respond to the innocence of childhood. "My Wonderful World of Make Believe" was conceived from my memories of childhood, some good and some not so good. I had a great desire to create an image that would best reflect such contemplation. As a visual being, I moved to reiterate my thoughts into line, shape and color.

I began by rolling black lithographic ink on the plate. Like a sculptor, I created form by wiping away, redrawing continuously until the perfect shapes appear. Often times, this is where the struggle and dialogue I have with my image commence. I tell it one thing and it tells me another. After the shapes are born, I work to fill each shape with its appropriate color. I knew this print was about childhood; therefore, I decided upon primary colors. The bold somewhat awkward red shape symbolizes myself and the energy I have for life and living. The two smaller shapes of yellow and blue work together to recreate my home as a child. The surrounding black is representative of my past. The variety of lines used as mark-making, throughout the image, work to generate an active environment for the shapes.

Before I printed the plate, I instinctively knew the composition needed another element. I searched high and low for the missing piece, the perfect element that would complete the image. Lo and behold, I found it! Thrilled with my discovery, I dashinglly chine colléd it and pulled the print. I have a strong sense of visual completion. I inherently know when an image is finished. It stems from a lot of practice and from a certain gut impulse.



As He Got Up And Left

"AS HE GOT UP AND LEFT"

Yet there is a great sense in all great art that behind the darkness and the nightmares that it portrays, behind humanity's anguished cries that it gives voice to, there is order, harmony and peace. There is fear in Shakespeare's 'Tempest' and in Mozart's magic flute, but it is cast out of love. There is horror and ugliness, but a new order of harmony and beauty evolves out of them, there is evil but it is overcome by good.⁷

At this point in the development of my thesis, I was confident in my ability to convey my intent through my medium. This piece challenged me to give parturition to an event I would have rather forgotten about. I instinctively realized if I allowed myself to use this highly sparked emotional virility, the image would materialize into a powerful personal statement. Quite ironically, such intense pondering about the validity of my content allowed me to quickly and spontaneously use my medium to execute a two-dimensional representation of this event.

I used brilliant red and blue hues to depict an aggressive environment. Intrusive mark-making set the stage for uneasiness, perplexity and an altogether fidgety and disturbing mood. In the end, "As He Got Up and Left" contains a unity that effectively conveys my intent.

Mitchell's work, like her life, is filled with ironies. Viewers totally unaware of a particular loss experienced by the artist may feel exhilaration in a work actually painted during a time of severe sadness or pain. The communication between the artist and the audience is not always a direct unbroken line. Yet it is Mitchell's sureness of stroke and her luminous color sensibility that repeatedly affirms her commitment to the act of painting.⁸



I Felt Hopeless

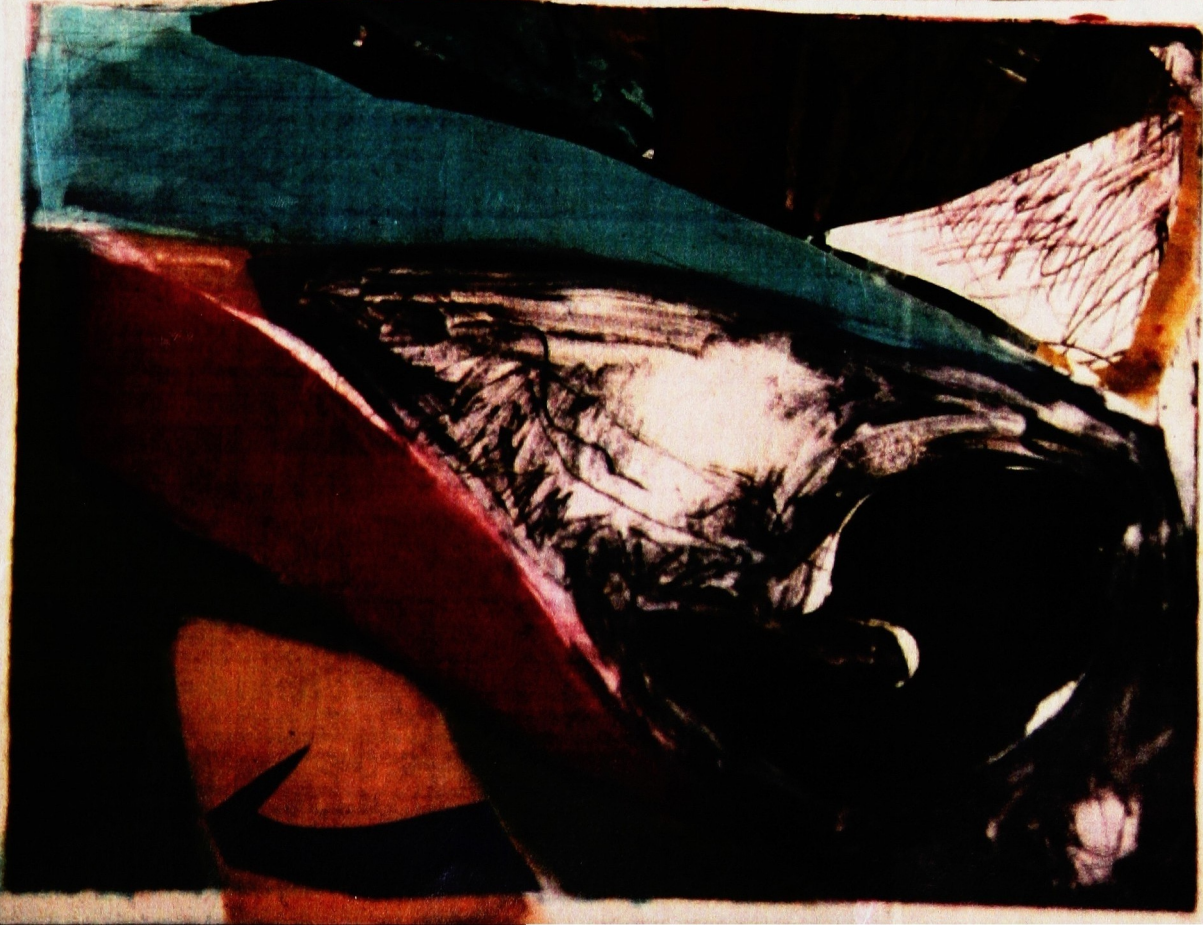
Like Mitchell, most of my reasoning for creating art stems from, or is an acknowledgement of, substantially disturbing things. Although the viewer, for the most part, perceives my imagery as being wonderfully complacent and happy. This contradiction is a beautiful aspect of my work. It allows me the freedom to be true to my artistic convictions, as well as the willingness and openness to accept individual interpretation regarding the meaning behind my imagery.

"I FELT HOPELESS"

Serendipity: The knack of stumbling upon interesting discoveries in a casual manner.

"I Felt Hopeless" was an attempt at monoprinting a larger image. It is monumental, insofar as I used new and novel techniques to create form and texture. A razor blade, sandpaper and a rag soaked in solvent were used to create this image. It was, I realized, a reduction process (to take away). Once I gave birth to my personal shapes, I swiftly moved to add color by rolling ink onto each shape, heightening and expanding the significance of each within the complexity of the picture plane.

I started this image by rolling black lithographic ink onto the surface of my plate. I used a rag soaked with solvent to take away the ink forming shape, in particular, the "fetus" shape. Afterwards, I took a razor blade and pulled away the



Sometimes it Snows in April

ink on the left hand side. I was interested, but quite sure of the texture it might create. I used sandpaper to rub away the ink around the "fetus", thus creating a flag-like shape on the right hand side. I filled the "fetus" with color by applying orange pastel to the surface of the plate. At that point I pulled a print through the press. I was excited with the effects my new materials offered the image. But it was not enough to make a strong visual statement.

The print needed more color. I used a subtle hue relationship to heighten the content of the image. The fetus shape seemed trapped within its own cell. I rolled ink with a brayer (see Appendix #3) forming three shapes symbolizing confinement. The orange triangular shape, on the lower left hand side, exaggerates the feeling of entrapment and echos the three shapes above.

I titled this print "I Felt Hopeless" because the image suggests a feeling of abandonment, neglect and solitude.

"SOMETIMES IT SNOWS IN APRIL"

When the image is what matters, printmakers ignore old rules against mixing mediums and techniques... 'It's very American and consistant with what's been going on,' says Kenneth Tyler of Tyler Graphics, LTD. about the vogue now for combo prints made by combining two or more printing techniques. 'Recently I've seen examples by younger artists who seem to be trying in some effect, to get away from standard uniform editions,' observes Robert Rainwater, keeper of prints at the New York State Public Library. Since the 1960's, when they became a mainstream development in printmaking, combo prints have reflected the contemporary graphic sensibility - the desire of artists, printers, and printmakers. ¹⁰

"Sometimes It Snows in April" is a mix-media image combining traditional printmaking techniques with contemporary twists. The image is made of two intaglio prints. I would like to discuss the techniques used in each print, elaborate on why I have chosen to present the two as one image, and explain the intent of the piece.

The print on the left-hand side originated by experimenting with white ground (see Appendix #4). This process is useful for obtaining painterly effects. Before applying the white ground to the zinc, it is first aquatinted (see Appendix #5). This provides a tooth for the white ground, enabling it to adhere to the plate. Once the white ground is dried, the plate is put into a bath of nitric acid. The acid "eats" the exposed areas of the plate and creates depressed lines that are later inked and printed. This interaction between the materials created the womb-like shape in the lower left-hand corner.

I continued to develop the plate by aquatinting and open-biting (see Appendix #6). Thus, creating the yellow shape and the two leg-like shapes. The variety of lines found throughout the piece is the result of line biting (see Appendix #7).

The print was over printed many times to build the luminous color relationships. I used *à la poupée* (see Appendix #8). I also hand rolled ink directly on the print. The last



step was to *chine collé* the blue and triangular shapes along the right hand side.

The print on the right-hand side was created by using open-biting (the blue dominant form), line-biting, surface rolling (see Appendix #9), *chine collé*, (lower left hand side piece), and transfer pastels.

The two prints made a much stronger visual statement together than they could separately. When I put the prints side by side, I became excited about the central shape that they formed. I also realized, as one image, it contained a sense of consistant movement adding to the complexity of the picture.

"Sometimes It Snows In April" is an image that speaks very strongly of the physical aspect of printmaking. The intent of this image was born through the process. I cannot explain the meaning of the picture. There wasn't an emotional reaction driving me to create this image, my inspiration for this piece was my love for the medium and creating. "Yet art by its very nature is such a blessedly subjective activity that subtle elements of autobiography have a way of slipping into the most non-professedly non-objective works of art."¹¹

"THE FISH MONSTER STORY BOOK"

"When the child was a child. A time of questions without the possibilities of answers. Who am I? And why am I not you?"¹² Upon seeing, "Wings of Desire," a movie written

by Ven Wenders in collaboration with Peter Handke, I was inspired to create an artist book: "The Fish Monster Story Book".

This book is a collection of ten photo-etchings (see Appendix 10), collage, computer generated imagery and *chine collée* with hand made paper. The images consist of fish monsters swimming in a variety of environments. Some swim in fish monster vases, coffee cups, lace and plants. Others swim in hand drawn children's pictures, fish monster fun houses, and collages of printed parts. These elements are all innovative images enhancing creativity for children and adults.

W. Lambert Brillian, in his book, Creativity, Art and the Young Child, interprets the artistic growth of young children. His theories suggest that the child's vision is parallel to that of the adult artist. The child and the artist have an extreme curiosity for the changing, ever enlarging environment. The purpose of my book was, in some way, to touch upon the sensitivities and keen degree of awareness that the child and the artist possess.

I feel I have captured this creative innocence by presenting the images in a drawing pad. The pad gives a more welcoming invitation to the viewer and is less pretentious than a bound book.

The "Fish Monster Story Book" is a permanent part of the Wallace Memorial Archive Collection and is available for viewing upon request.

"A HISTORICAL NOTE"

It has been brought to my attention that I should explain to you, the reader, my artistic development over the last two years that eventually lead to the creation of my thesis imagery. I will present a brief synopsis of my artistic evolution through a discussion of selected imagery.

In the beginning, I was much more interested in building a mastery of craft, rather than producing images dealing with personal content. I was always excited about creating pictures but I did not have the knowledge needed to effectively express intent through the use of my technique. I developed a language enabling me to combine the two through dedication, commitment and hard work.

"My Pink House" is a good example of my concern with mastering technique. It is an intaglio print which speaks strongly of the graphic nature in printmaking. The print was pulled through the press three times. I used two surface rolls to achieve the gray and pink textures. I hand wiped the black center square shape and the upper left-hand corner shape. I spent less time developing plates than I did printing them. For me, the excitement in printmaking is experimenting with printing. "Image #2" is printed from the same plate as "My Pink House". I reprinted "Image #2" several more times than "My Pink House", building a broader complexity of color relationships. I worked to create a mature sense of color.

"Image #3" was my first experiment with combining techniques. I used aluminum plate lithography (see Appendix #11) and intaglio. My work at this time began to be more personal and less graphic. This image, in particular, paved the path for my present interest in monoprinting. It is important for me to mention that all my prints are unique. I spent more time developing an image than I would if I were to edition a plate.

"Untitled #4" was a culmination of everything I learned in my first year. I began to use primed cardboard and mylar to create different surface textures. I cut an older zinc plate into four parts and began to build an image by reprinting several times. I also experimented with color viscosity printing to create new pictorial space relationships. "Untitled #4" was an artistic breakthrough for me. Although the shapes were still geometric, my use of color was improving and my imagery was becoming more personal, more visually stimulating.

"Untitled #5" was an experimentation with cardboard relief printing. I created shapes by cutting cardboard pieces and reprinting them several times. In retrospect, this image, along with others from this period, were not very successful. The colors are too muddy and the compositions are too busy. But it is important to realize this struggle helped me to create better imagery. I needed to work more directly and spontaneously. By the end of the quarter, I produced my first mono-

print, "Image #6". It was done on mylar with rolled ink and lithographic crayons. Soon after, I worked on developing my new form of expression: monoprinting.

In conclusion, I believe my thesis presentation was a culmination of everything I have learned throughout my graduate studies. In addition to formal innovations, my imagery has evolved to express basic human emotions and convey personal insight. My artistic ideals can be best summarized in the following passage by Magdalena Abakanowicz:

In the unconscious of contemporary man, mythology is still buoyant. It belongs to a higher spiritual plane than his conscious life. The most superficial being is crowded by symbols and the most logical person lives through images. Symbols never disappear from the field of reality; they can change their guise, but their role remains unchanged.

Music or smell, a thoughtful pause, a casual word, a landscape, can release nostalgic images and dreams. They always express much more than the person who experiences them can in turn convey in words. Most people do not know how to verbalize such mental experiences, not from lack of intelligence, but because they cannot give sufficient weight to analytical language. It seems to me that these images can bring people closer together more effectively and in a more effective way than analytical language.

Contemporary man might make light of these mental images, which does not alter the fact that he lives with them and through them. They are a real and undeniable part of human nature - they constitute the imagination.

To have imagination and to be aware of it is to benefit from possessing an inner richness and a spontaneous and endless flood of images. It means to see the world in its entirety, since the point of the images is to show all that which escapes conceptualization.¹²

My Pink House



Image 2





Image 3



Untitled 4

Untitled 5

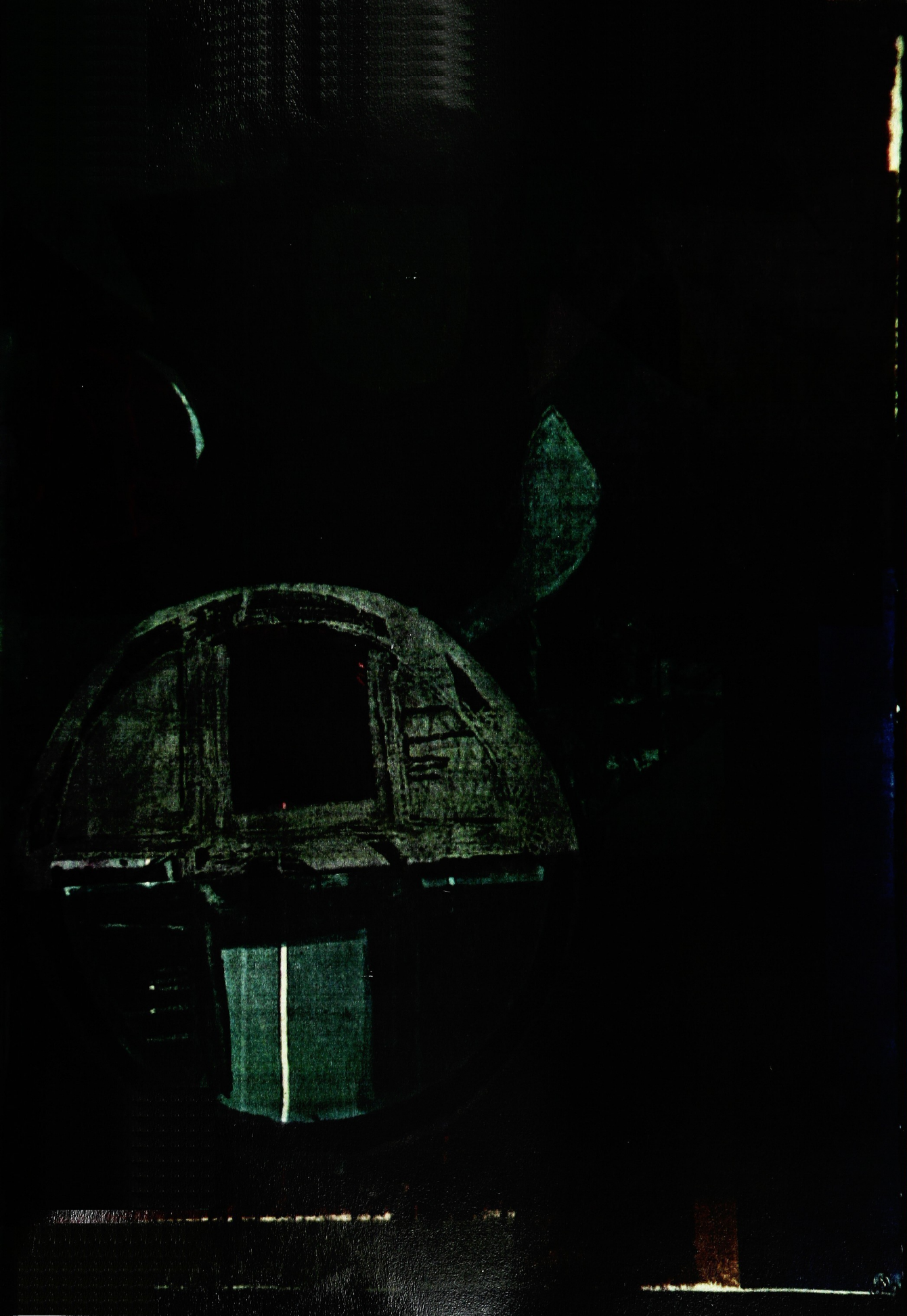


Image 6





APPENDIX OF PRINTMAKING TERMONOLOGY

Directly cited from: Donald Staff, The History and Process of Printmaking (Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 165-171, 425-430.

1. Aluminum plate: a metal used in plate lithography; however, I adapted it for my use in monoprinting.
2. chine-collé: In the traditional technique of *chine collé* a thin sized oriental paper is simultaneously printed upon and adhered to a heavier weight paper under pressure. This process can be applied to both lithography and intaglio. As it was employed in the 1800's for quality book illustrations or individual works of art, *chine collé* was done on the plate area, leaving the heavier paper showing in the margins. The technique is occasionally employed today for applying cut or torn shapes that become part of the image itself. Sized India paper, which could be dampened slightly and then used immediately, was available at one time. It is now necessary to prepare your own paper for *chine collé*.
Several types of adhesives can be used. Cellulose glue, such as Metylan, has proven very effective when thinned and brushed onto the paper. The *chine collé* paper is brushed quickly with the adhesive and placed onto the inked plate immediately; the print is made as before. This technique allows the *chine collé* paper to distend slightly before being run through the press. Since it is damp with adhesive as it is put on the plate, it will dry at the same rate as the backing paper.
3. Brayer: hand roller used for applying ink to a surface.
4. White ground: substance containing white oil paint, linseed oil and soap powder.
5. Aquatint: intaglio process in which rosin or asphaltum powder is used to produce a tonal or textural surface on a metal plate.
6. Open biting: in etching, exposing large areas of the plate to acid.
7. Line biting: Intaglio technique in which a metal plate is covered with an acid-resistant ground, then worked with an etching needle. The metal is "eaten" in the acid bath, creating depressed lines that are later inked and printed.

8. à la poupée: one plate can be inked with several colors, instead of just one. With a little skill, the technique can be employed to blend one color into another. For each color, a separate dabber, corresponding in size to the plate is created and inked separately. Small rectangular pieces of felt or other cloth, tightly rolled and tied with some string, serve the purpose. Because of the petite doll-like appearance of the dabbers, this method is sometimes called à la poupée (*poupée* is the French word for doll). Each color is rubbed onto an area with a dabber, wiped with tarlatan, and finally hand wiped before another area is inked. The complete plate is run through the press.
9. Surface rolling: Surface rolling is one of the simplest methods of obtaining a two-color intaglio print. In this method, the incised areas of the plate print in one color, the flat surface in another. The plate is first inked with one color and wiped. A clean wiping done either by hand or with paper will leave a better surface for the second color, which will therefore print more clearly. Then, with a roller large enough to cover the entire plate, a film of the second color is applied. This color rides on the surface, and does not penetrate the incised portions. Lithographic inks are preferred for surface rolling because they impart excellent lumenosity and brilliance when inked thinly on the plate.
10. Photoetching: In the photoetching technique, a light-sensitive metal plate is exposed to a piece of photographic film under ultraviolet light. The opaque areas of film prevent exposure on corresponding areas of the plate, causing the photo resist on the plate to dissolve in the developing bath. These areas, bitten down after etching, will print the image in intaglio. Clear areas of the film, in turn, will allow the metal to be exposed to the light and the photo resist to become nonsoluble. These areas of the plate are acid-resistant after developing and will print in relief. For making relief prints, therefore, the transparency should be opaque and the image clear. For intaglio printing, the transparent film should be a positive. Kodak Photo Resist (KPR) is one of the best light-sensitive resist coatings available.
11. Aluminum plate lithography: A lithographic process done on an aluminum plate rather than stone.

FOOTNOTES

¹"Elizabeth Murray: Shape Shifter," Art in America, April, 1989, 214.

²"Dustan Knight," Artspeak, May, 1989, 1.

³Garo Z. Antreasian, The Tamarind Book of Lithography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1971), 237.

⁴Ben Shaun, The Shape of Content (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), 53.

⁵Vileam Flusser, "Curies Children," Art Forum, Summer, 1988, 17.

⁶Patricia Hills, Alice Neal, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983), 11.

⁷Arianna Strassinopoulous Hulfington, "Picasso: The Creator or Destroyer," The Atlantic, June, 1988, 78.

⁸"Dark Victories - Joan Mitchell," Artnews, Summer, 1988, 156.

⁹Webster's New World Dictionary, rev. ed. (1983), s.v. "surrendipity".

¹⁰Ronny Cohen, "The Medium Isn't the Message", Artnews, October, 1985, 74.

¹¹"Dustan Knight," Artspeak, May, 1989, 1.

¹²Magdalena Abakanowicz, Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 152.

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The purpose of my thesis was to create a body of work based upon the symbolic use of color and form. Monotype printmaking, in particular, was the most effective technique for materializing my thoughts into two-dimensional images.

A kind of pictorial yoga, Murray's work is an exercise in matter over mind - at any rate, in hands on making over programmatic thinking - and, as such, an object lesson in what can, 1 rather than what should be done to a painting.

As I started to create images for my thesis, I began to understand and develop an ideology about my visual language. In the succeeding paragraphs I, as best I can, will share with you my thoughts:

It seems I can create bold and luminous prints when my initial intent is in response to an intense personal feeling. Moreover, working non-objectively allows me to create my own realities within the pictorial space. I have always worked intuitively and have realized this inner stimulation, rather than an external preconceived idea, results in a more powerful personal statement. Making pictures is my means of communicating with the outside world. Shape, line, and color are my alphabet used to create a visual language. I do not have a need or want to look outside myself for sources or reasons that justify making art. I do it because I believe in its silent power of expression. As the image develops, my response to the emotion is transformed into the physical